



## Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Added to Directory

The variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD), not to be confused with the traditional Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, is a rare and fatal condition affecting a person's central nervous system. The same agent that causes 'mad cow disease' is responsible for causing vCJD in humans. This bovine spongiform encephalopathy agent (BSE agent) is a deformed prion that can trigger normal proteins to change shape and become infectious. Patients with this disease will start to show psychiatric symptoms such as depression, followed by neurological signs that become progressively worse. The median duration of illness is 14 months, although it takes years for the disease to become symptomatic after initial infection. Since a single Holstein dairy cow on a Washington state farm tested positive for mad cow disease in late December, there has been upsurge of concerns over consuming beef products in America.



Over 30 countries have banned all imports of U.S. beef products, including Japan, South Korea, and Mexico. Although infection with vCJD was thought to have come only when eating the brain, spinal cord, or any other part of an infected cow's central nervous system, it may also be linked to blood transfusions, liver transplants, pituitary-derived human growth hormone injections, and other medical procedures. Because the incubation period of this disease can span over a decade, it may be unknown whether a donor is infected at the time of the procedure. The odds increase if the donor has ever lived in England.

Additional information about this disease can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/cjd/cjd.htm>. Any laboratories capable of testing for the BSE agent are encouraged to add this information to the directory at <http://198.97.78.142/vphl/VPHLASP/Login.asp>

## Another Case of SARS Reported in China

After 6 months of inactivity, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS, has shown up again in Guangdong, China. Since the SARS epidemic began in November 2003, over 8,000 people were infected and 774 killed worldwide. Until now, no cases have been reported since June 2003. Although the 32-year-old television producer

has been declared fully fit to be discharged today, Chinese officials are taking no chances of another outbreak. 10,000 civet cats, a delicacy in Southern China, are being slaughtered due to the suspicion that they are the cause of animal-to-human transmission.

## Influenza Update

According to the World Health Organization, the influenza A(H3N2) virus continues to increase in parts of Africa and Europe. However, influenza activity has declined in such European countries as Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom, as with most parts of Canada. Although influenza activity continues to increase overall in the United States, activity in some states, including Texas and Colorado, has declined in recent weeks. On

December 16<sup>th</sup>, an outbreak of avian influenza A(H5N1) was reported in poultry at a chicken farm in the Republic of Korea. Nine other poultry farms in the country have since been infected. Fears of a human outbreak stem from the 1997 A(H5N1) outbreak in Hong Kong, causing six deaths and another in 2003. The outbreak in Korea resulted in over one million chickens and ducks being culled.